

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM “E-NEWS”

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
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WDP Funding Faces Ups and Downs

By Doug Harr
DNR Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator

It seems that in the business of wildlife conservation there's always some good news and some bad news. Let's dispense with the bad news first, so you'll end up with something more positive. Congress adjourned in November without taking further action on the Conservation And Restoration Act (CARA) or its five-year slimmed-down version known just as Senate Bill 990. With the end of this session, both bills are now dead, and any longer-term funding proposals for helping states with unmet needs of nongame wildlife will have to start from scratch once again. Given the exploding national deficit and spending for Iraqi war preparations, more money for conservation is about the last thing on this administration's mind. Likewise, a third year of substitute annual appropriations for wildlife (sometimes called “CARA-Lite”) continue to be hung up with Congress' failure to pass the fiscal 2003 federal budget. Whether or not we end up with another year's allocation remains to be seen.

Now, on to brighter news. With federal monies allocated Iowa over the past two years, we continue to make progress in efforts to help wildlife species of concern. In the last newsletter I mentioned we'd purchased a 240-acre addition to the Kellerton Bird Conservation Area in Ringgold County and were working on 80 acres of neotropical songbird habitat in Lucas County. The latter project is just now being completed and will be added to the Cedar Creek Unit of Stephens State Forest. Wildlife Diversity Program staff will work with the Forestry Bureau to implement management plans benefiting everything from scarlet tanagers to Kentucky warblers (not to mention resident turkeys, rare Indiana bats and lots of other neat wildlife). A pending addition to Spring Run Grasslands Bird Conservation Area (Iowa's newest official BCA) will add 140 acres as part of the Larry Wilson Legacy Wetlands project. In O'Brien County, The Nature Conservancy has been holding a critical acquisition at Waterman Prairie for DNR, and purchase should soon be possible with our CARA-Lite funding. Several more habitat acquisitions are in the works.

Our new research projects funded by CARA-Lite are also moving along. A bobcat pilot study soon will have us capturing and radio-tagging bobcats, to learn more about this interesting and elusive Iowa mammal. Final approvals also has been given a bird habitat study at Spring Run BCA, and a study of the large wind farm north of Clear Lake will help us learn more about the effects of wind generators on our wildlife resources.

All these projects require matching funds in order to make use of available federal dollars. With DNR's budget shortages, our agency did not have the match required to access the federal funds. Fortunately, many private partnerships are helping make these projects possible. Some of our contributors to date include Audubon Iowa, Pheasants Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, Iowa State University's Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit and several individuals. Without their help we might not be able to use the federal funds allocated our agency. In fact, we have nearly a million dollars left to capture before October, and more partnership matching dollars will be needed to help, so as not to lose those federal dollars. If you belong to an organization that might wish to help out, let us know. We'll probably be able to find a project that needs assistance.

Two final items are worth noting. For better or worse, tax time is here again. Remember that the "Chickadee Checkoff" allows Iowans receiving tax refunds to contribute by writing in an amount on the "Fish & Wildlife Fund Contribution" line near the end of your Iowa Form 1040. This money is earmarked *only* for the Wildlife Diversity Program, and, in fact, makes up about 50-60% of our average annual state program budget.

Finally, the new Nongame Certificate for 2003 is now available from DNR. The \$5 cost of this collectible photograph also helps keep the Wildlife Diversity Program running. This year the featured species is a mother bobcat and her kittens, the great picture taken by noted Iowa wildlife photographer Ty Smedes. The subject was selected to coincide with our new bobcat research project and is only the third time a mammal has been the featured subject since the certificate series began back in 1979. The 2002 certificate, featuring an Osprey, will remain available only until March, so you'll have to act soon if you want that edition. Either certificate may be purchased from Wildlife Diversity Program staff, at various "watchable wildlife" events, or by order from the DNR License Bureau, Wallace State Office Bldg., Des Moines, IA 50319-0034.

2003 Bald Eagle Watch Events

by Bruce Ehresman

Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist

Iowa ranks as one of the most important wintering areas for bald eagles in the lower 48 states. As northern rivers and lakes freeze over, eagles fly south as far as they need to in order to find open water where they can catch fish. It is during this time of the year that approximately 2,000 bald eagles make Iowa their winter retreat. Most can be found concentrated in various size groups around open water areas; particularly near locks and dams and stream riffles. The Mississippi River, in particular, supports from 2,500 to 5,500 bald eagles between St. Paul and St. Louis, and this is the most important river for Iowa's wintering eagles.

Winter is also the time of the year that Iowans celebrate this abundance of eagles by participating in one of the many Bald Eagle Appreciation Days' events held along some of our major rivers. Since 1985, these events have been held throughout the state with programs designed to allow people to both view eagles and learn more about them. Bald Eagle Days for 2003 are scheduled for the following locations and times. Please contact the person at the phone number listed for more specific information about the programs.

- Clinton Jan. 7 contact Jim Kelly (815-259-3628)
- Dubuque Jan. 11 contact Wayne Buchholtz (563-556-0620)
- Quad Cities Jan. 11-12 contact QCCA Expo Center (309-786-1477)
- Guttenberg Jan. 18-19 contact Jean Curtis (563-252-4120)
- Bellevue Jan. 19 contact Ann Burns (563-652-3783)
- Keokuk Jan. 18-19 contact Tom Buckley (800-383-1219)
- Wapsi River EE Center Feb. 1 contact Bob Bryant (563-843-2855)
- Red Rock Lake/Pella Feb. 22 contact Tracy Spry (641-828-7522)
- Saylorsville Lake Feb. 23 contact Kelly Ulrick (515-276-4656)

Bald eagles can be seen wintering in Iowa from December through early March. Eagles perch in large trees (especially cottonwoods) close to the edge of open water, with early morning being a good time to view them feeding. Please remember to follow good eagle viewing etiquette and allow the bird the space it feels comfortable in. When possible, stay in your vehicle or stand behind a stationary object when viewing eagles. It is also good policy to view eagles from the opposite side of a river or lake to allow them a peaceful refuge. **HAPPY EAGLE WATCHING!**

NatureMapping 2 "Blessed" for 2003

By Mark McInroy

DNR Wildlife Diversity Program Technician

For those of you familiar with the continuing story of the Nature Mapping 2 (NM2) website survey development process persisting nearly as long as this sentence has, I am happy to inform you that it will be operational in the year 2003. Quite a bold (yet ambiguous) statement given the history of this project. However, the WDP program has finally given the technical team at Information Technology Services in Iowa City the official "blessing" to move into the final stages. Barb Gigar, training officer of the Communications office of the DNR, noted that if the process went into 2003 she would have seen 3 different years of this project. Both she and WDP are excited to have it operational soon. Jason O'Brien, coordinator of NM1 with ISU extension, and the WDP crew will be sending out a kickoff letter once we have full speed ahead clearance. Until then, I anticipate receiving your data and seeing you at our NM2 training clinics. Check out the DNR website for dates, or contact me directly at the address below.

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Songbird Packet: Habitat Provided by State Forest Nursery

by Pat Schlarbaum, Wildlife Diversity Program Technician

and Ruth Herzberg, Forestry Technician

Each year Iowa DNR Forestry Bureau provides a number of wildlife specialty packets for habitat enhancement. The Songbird Packet is designed specifically to provide urban homeowners a means to landscape their yards with plant species native to Iowa that attract wildlife and songbirds in particular. This year's Songbird Packet includes four favorite trees and 16 shrubs: two Bur Oak, two White Pine, four Wild Plum, four Chokecherry, four Gray dogwood, and four Serviceberry. These species will attract a variety of songbirds year round by offering cover for nesting and escape, and also food.

Besides their aesthetic importance to humans – making life more enjoyable – songbirds are also economically significant. Many species help to control insects that are injurious to farm crops, orchards, forest trees and gardens. The actual value of this service, apart from other means of control, is difficult to appraise but priceless to a healthy environment. Oaks and pines are ranked first and second according to their value to wildlife, with wild cherries and dogwoods ranking fourth and fifth, so you can understand the \$20.00 per packet value. The order form can be accessed on DNR website at www.state.ia.forestry.

Three excellent sources of information used in this text are *Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri*, by Don Kurz, *American Wildlife and Plants: A Guide to Wildlife Food and Habits*, by Martin, Zim and Nelson, and *Nature's Heartland*, by Bill Boon and Harlen Groe, which is out of print but will be available on CD in January at www.NaturesCD.com.

Bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), or Mossycup oak is the Midwest's greatest oak. It leads the battle against prairie grasses for possession of land. The deeply furrowed bark that covers even the twigs of seedling Bur oaks is fire resistant and enables the tree to survive prairie fires, establishing a foothold where other forest trees can eventually follow.

Acorns are very near the top of the wildlife food preference list, not so much because they are a preferred food item but because they constitute a good and abundantly available staple – the staff of life for many wildlife species. Their greatest value is in the critical winter season when other foods are scarce. When the acorn crop occasionally fails, a number of wildlife species may be hard pressed for sustenance.

In addition to their food value, oaks also provide useful wildlife cover. Oak leaves are used by many birds as nesting material. Oaks are the most important group of broad-leaf timber trees in the country and constitute a major proportion of our eastern forests.

Bur oak is usually wider than it is tall; it often grows 75 feet in height and spreads 100 feet in width. Leaves are thick with a glossy, dark green color above and silvery beneath, giving the tree a sparkling appearance from a distance when the wind blows the foliage. The acorn has an extra deep cup, covering at least half the nut. The cup's outer fringe suggests a small bird's nest. Bur Oak grows slowly and lives for 200 to 300 years.

When oaks are available near ponds and streams they are eaten by ducks, especially wood ducks and mallards. Quail will peck out the meats. Wild turkeys swallow the acorns whole, regardless of size; Squirrels and rodents store the acorns for winter use. Deer are fond of the acorns and also browse on foliage and twigs.

Acorns constitute up to 62% of the diet of wood ducks. They also can be important food items for pintail duck, sharp-tailed grouse, common crow, red fox, muskrat, ring-necked pheasant, prairie chicken, cottontail rabbit, bobwhite, flying squirrel, eastern chipmunk, white-footed mouse, ruffed grouse, fox squirrel, wild turkey, white-tailed deer, northern flicker, starling, rose-breasted grosbeak, downy woodpecker, Carolina wren, white-breasted nuthatch, red-bellied and red-headed woodpeckers, blue jay and tufted titmouse. Acorns comprise a small portion of the diet of birds such as rose-breasted grosbeak and brown thrasher.

White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) is among the finest evergreens for ornamental planting. It grows rapidly when young--a seedling can reach a height of more than 50 feet in 30 years--and it accepts severe pruning better than any other tree of its general type. This last characteristic makes it useful in tall hedges and windbreak plantings. Eastern white pine prefers moist sandy loam but will grow on a variety of sites and soil conditions.

Pines rank near the very top in importance to wildlife. Their seeds constitute more than 50% of the diet of the red crossbill so important to this migratory visitor. Unfortunately, the annual crop of pine seeds varies considerably -- some years bring a heavy yield and in other the crop is light.

Pine needles are consumed by some species of grouse and by several browsers. Pines are also valuable as cover for wildlife. Large pines are favorite roosting places for robins during migration and also are among the most common nesting sites for mourning doves. Pine needles are used as nest material by several songbirds. Several stately white pines in Northeast Iowa are supporting Bald Eagle nests.

Wild Plum (*Prunus americana*) fruit is eaten by many species of birds, including bobwhite quail and even mammals such as fox and raccoon. The fruit also makes excellent jellies and preserves, or it may be eaten raw or cooked. It is rated as the best fruit plum in the Midwest and North regions.

Wild plum is one of the first shrubs to bloom in woodlands. Its showy white flowers appear before leaves have unfolded and while the woods are mostly bare of foliage. The thickets that are common with plum furnish valuable protective cover to wildlife.

Choke Cherry (*Prunus virginiana*). There are about 14 native species of wild cherries widely distributed throughout the country. They are considered among the most important wildlife food plants. Wild cherries are eaten by a wide variety of songbirds, game birds, and mammals from raccoons to white-footed mouse. It is a common sight to see robins and starlings, flying back and forth to wild cherry trees, loading themselves with fruits and then, perching in nearby trees, regurgitating the pits. Sometimes as many as two or three dozen birds will make a nearly continuous flow of aerial traffic into a single cherry tree or group of trees -- often with a dozen or more feeding actively at the same time.

Indigenous people used a warm drink made from the bark to ease pains of childbirth, and a tea made of the root bark as a sedative and stomach remedy. Early settlers used root bark to treat malaria, worms, tuberculosis, indigestion and fever. A tea made from the bark, leaves and dried root has been used for lung ailments and colds. The bark is sometimes used as flavoring agent in cough syrup.

The small tree is sometimes planted for ornament and for erosion control. It has been in cultivation since 1724. The fruit is used to make jellies and jams.

Fruits make up a small percentage of the diet for eastern bluebird, blue jay, Baltimore oriole, white-throated sparrow, scarlet tanager, hermit thrush, veery, red-eyed vireo, hairy woodpecker, catbird,

northern flicker, kingbird, wood thrush, red-bellied and red-headed woodpeckers. They can comprise 5-25% of food requirements of rose-breasted grosbeak, starling, brown thrasher, cedar waxwing and American robin.

Gray Dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) is an excellent choice for landscaping purposes and wildlife habitat. The fruit of gray dogwood is eaten by at least 25 species of birds, including ruffed grouse and bobwhite quail. Unlike the sprawling branches of other dogwood, the fine upper twigs of gray dogwood provide excellent support for woven grass nests of catbirds, mockingbirds and redwing blackbirds.

This species of dogwood forms thickets from new shoots that emerge from the spreading roots. Gray dogwood is persistent on unfavorable sites and endures city smoke. It has been cultivated as an ornamental since 1758. Leaves turn a purplish-red to rose-red or purplish-brown in autumn. If planted in a natural setting, gray dogwood blends handsomely with either smooth sumac on hills or common ninebark in valleys.

The wood of gray dogwood is hard, heavy and durable, but does not get large enough for commercial use. Some of the tips of the upper branches may have an enlarged or swollen portion the size of a marble. This is the dogwood bud gall, caused by a gall gnat, and it occurs only on this species.

Fruits comprise up to 5% of diet of starling, tree swallow, scarlet tanager, hairy, pileated and red-bellied woodpecker, eastern bluebird, catbird, purple finch, northern flicker, crested flycatcher, kingbird, brown thrasher, hermit thrush, red-eyed vireo, and downy woodpecker. They can provide 5-10% of the nutrition of northern cardinal, robin, yellow-bellied sapsucker, wood and gray-cheeked thrush, and cedar waxwing.

Serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*) or Juneberry, usually is found on well-drained slopes in woodlands. Serviceberry is a valuable wildlife plant, with at least 35 species of birds eating the fruit and 11 species of mammals either eating the fruit or browsing the twigs and foliage.

The showy white flowers are among the first woody plants to bloom in the spring, appearing before the leaves open. It is used in landscaping for its showy white flowers and red fruit. Fall foliage is very colorful, turning a pale orange or gold blended with red and green. It can be eaten raw or cooked in pies, puddings or muffins. Indigenous people used the fruit in bread making, first making a paste from it, then drying it and mixing it with cornmeal.

Its juicy, sweet fruits are sought by thrushes and many other songbirds and they are important wildlife food during the early summer period (June and July). The dainty, white, long-petaled flowers are among the first spring blooming native woody plants.

Fruits comprise a small percentage of the annual food needs for eastern bluebird, northern cardinal, black-capped chickadee, northern flicker, rose-breasted grosbeak, mockingbirds, scarlet tanager, brown thrasher, wood thrush, tufted titmouse, downy and hairy woodpecker, catbird, Baltimore oriole, veery, and cedar waxwing, especially in NE Iowa.

The word "service" is a derivation of *sarviss*, which is said to be modified form of *sorbus*, the name applied to a fruit known to the Romans and resembling that of *Amelanchier*. *Amelanchier* is from the name of a French province; *arborea* refers to the treelike characteristics of this species.

Limited Field Contact Time "Nurses" Skewed Impression of WDP Teammates (Levity Intended) Editorial by Mark McInroy, Wildlife Diversity Program Technician

As the new guy, I am finding myself a bit wary lately. This position has been one of the biggest tests of my patience and wits I have ever dealt with. But with that said, I am calmed while surrounded with competence of my teammates and our many partners. I find myself, for the first time, hesitant to engage into situations, philosophy, or political discussion due to lack of really "knowing" whom each of us is. Personally, I believe this to be due to lack of side-by-side contact hours in the field. Not a big deal really, but it dramatically slows the process of getting to know each other's abilities and temperament. I have always thought the best way to get to know someone is in the field (or on the golf course): neutral arena, immediate goal, test of wits and patience, immediate opportunity for general philosophical discussion, and

opportunity to utilize the bonding power of humor. Shall I schedule our first tee-time this spring? The WDP crew does not get many chances to be in the field as we'd like, let alone side-by-side to boot. As a result, I have only superficial insight of my teammates and partners. I guess part of me doesn't want to offend or step on toes until I get to know someone well enough to at least accomplish it tactfully and rationally.

So at this point in my position, I have to remind myself that the people I am working with are indeed not: 1) Henny Penny -- Bruce, with his noble and dedicated angst; 2) Humpty Dumpty -- Pat, after all the kings horses and kings men (and a few of the kings doctors and physical therapists) put him back together again, thankfully; 3) "Father" Hubbard -- Doug, who goes to the cupboard all too frequently to find that it is still bare.

With these nursery rhyme metaphors it could be said that I spend too much time reading with my kids...? In the spirit of good fun, I'll leave you and my fellow staff to come up with your own metaphor that suits me. In the meantime, I look forward to developing into this broad network of wonderful and dedicated partners, contributors, and volunteers in 2003. Happy New Year. May all of you have good health and productive relationships.

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